

Practical Hermeneutics: JAP365

## THE ARMOR

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This article first appeared in the Practical Hermeneutics column of the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL, volume 36, number 05 (2013). For further information or to subscribe to the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL go to: <http://www.equip.org/christian-research-journal/>

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### The Armor

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” —Matt. 6:13<sup>1</sup>

My Dear Jezebelzebub:

I am commissioning you for the assignment of a generation. I have considered my legions of doom and have identified you as the very devil who can best pull it off. Even your name—derived from the best in human and demonic corruption—suggests that you have fallen for just such a time as this. Ah, even now the thought of Jezebel, who so admired my Beelzebubian ways, causes pride to rise up within the caldron of my nefarious mind.

Your mission—and you have no choice but to accept it—is to make sure the present generation of putrid evangelicals completely loses sight of the spiritual weapons of warfare listed in their manual under *the full armor of God*.

Perhaps a little history lesson will ignite the passions of your vile spirit and send you off on your assignment with malice and malevolence. I need not wax eloquent on the unfathomable pride that got me kicked out of the Adversary’s presence. There are, however, some devilishly delicious lessons that you must glean from my award-winning performance in the garden.

Those goody two-shoes never even saw me coming. I was dressed in my satin best as I slithered up to Eve. Therein, of course, lies a scrumptious satanic secret—never let the maggots see you in your naked deformity! Always put your best falsehood forward. But I digress.

Remember my seductive line? “*You will be like God.*” Not even I had any idea how hard and fast Eve would fall. A couple of bites later, she and that minnow-brained husband of hers were terminal. Just the thought of it makes my pride-pricked heart tingle with wicked delirium. Well, enough about me.

You, my dear Jezebelzebub, were not quite as successful with David. Remember the day he fell for Bathsheba? You thought you had won the war, but

you only won a battle. If only you could have kept him from uttering that wretched prayer of confession. Even now the very thought of it makes me want to vomit. Like a pinhead you began celebrating before the game was even over. Thank hell, I was shrewd enough to discover another chink in David's armor.

I shall never forget the day I incited that little shepherd-boy-turned-king into taking a census. As any dog-eared-Bible reader will tell you, that was one of my greatest victories. Sensuality was a step in the right direction, but that census was a giant leap forward. The same slingshot boy who once cried out, "Who is that uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" had begun to think those armies were his own doing. Pride, the mother of all other sins, had begun to brew like poison in his noxious little heart. He had fallen for the refrain of the damned — *me, my, mine*.

I was not quite as fortunate with the Root and the Offspring of David — the one they call the Second Adam. Remember those infamous wilderness temptations? I looked for the soft underbelly. He was hungry, so I thought for sure he would fall for the change-the-stones-into-bread routine. When that failed, I quoted a sentence from an Old Testament passage and contextualized it with a seductive suggestion. But alas, the Carpenter's Son knew the Scriptures too well. So I moved with blinding speed to my fallback position — the shortcut. "Forget that long, hard road to the cross," I purred. "Just make one short bow to me, and the kingdoms of this world will be yours." With anyone else it would have worked!

I bring up what you smart-mouthed, little minions refer to as "Beelzebub's boondoggle" for one hellish reason — to remind you that, whenever someone puts on the armor of the Adversary, we lose. When they don't, *we win*.

The first two human slugs dropped *the belt of truth* the moment they fell. Before the juice had even dried on her lips, Eve was already reciting the devil-made-me-do-it mantra. It didn't take long for *the breastplate of righteousness* to fall below David's knees either. Talk about a reproach to the *gospel of peace*! The moment he dropped *the shield of faith*, I knew he was no longer equipped to extinguish my flaming arrows. In fact, if David had not donned *the helmet of salvation and prayed*, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation," he would have been history.

The real danger, however, lies in the offensive weapons the Carpenter's Son wielded against me: *The sword of the Spirit and prayer*. It is imperative that today's generation be blinded to his example. And that, my dear Jezebelzebub, is precisely where you come in. Your expertise in the misuse of Scripture is notorious. Now I am counting on you to twist the very perception and practice of prayer. None of that "*Thy name, Thy will, Thy kingdom*" stuff. Your mission is to make selfish praying spiritual.

And let me forewarn you, if you should fail in your mission, there will be heaven to pay.

Your superior in deceit,

## Lord Beelzebub

The moment I turned my attention to the final petition of the prayer of Jesus, I was moved to write the above fictional letter from Beelzebub to a demon named Jezebelzebub. I did so in part because I fear that we often underestimate the unmitigated hatred the Devil and his demons have for the things of God.

Therefore, when you pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one,” you should immediately remember to “put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” That, of course, means that you are not only intimately acquainted with each piece of the armor described by Paul in Ephesians 6, but you understand what each piece represents:

*Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (vv. 14–18)*

We must neither overestimate nor underestimate the power and province of our adversary. No doubt much to his delight, we often depict the Devil as the author of darkness in much the same way that God is described as the Author of Light. That, however, is far from true. God is the sovereign Author of all creation; Satan is but an angel that He has created. Satan is not the opposite of the Creator. Rather, as a fallen angel, he is the counterpart to the archangel Michael.

While it has become fashionable to credit the Devil with every temptation we face, we must be ever mindful that spiritual warfare involves the world and the flesh as well. As Jesus makes clear in the parable of the Sower, we are often fruitless because of “the worries of this life, and the deceitfulness of wealth” (Matt. 13:22).

Just as we should never overestimate the Devil, we would also err greatly in underestimating his cunning craftiness. He is a malevolent being, the vastness of whose intellect exceeds that of any human who has ever lived, from Solomon to Socrates. “Thus we must not expect that a man, unaided from above, should ever be a match for an angel, especially an angel whose intellect has been sharpened by malice.”<sup>2</sup> From the primordial garden to the present generation, he and his hellish hordes have honed the craft of temptation. He knew just what to say to tempt Eve to fall into a life of constant sin terminated by death. And twice, the tempter found David’s Achilles’ heel and sent flaming arrows deep into his soul.

Furthermore, when we pray “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one,” we are acknowledging that God is sovereign over all things, including the temptations of Satan. Augustine rightly referred to the evil one as “the ape of God.” Likewise, Luther called the devil “God’s devil.” While our “enemy the devil prowls

around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8), he is a lion on a leash the length of which is determined by the Lord. It is significant to note that Jesus was “led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil” (Matt. 4:1). Thus, while Satan was the *agent of the temptation*, God was *the author of the testing*. Satan used the occasion to tempt Christ to sin; God used the occasion to demonstrate that he could not sin.

Finally, whenever we pray “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one,” we are reminded to look forward to the day when we will be completely set free from all temptations. The very fact that Jesus withstood the temptations in the wilderness is our guarantee that one day soon the Kingdom will be ours. The tempter will be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur (Rev. 20:10), and temptations, such as those depicted in the letter above, will be no more. We will enter the golden City with divine assurance that “nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27).<sup>3</sup> —*Hank Hanegraaff*

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## NOTES

- 1 All Scripture quotations are from NIV1984.
- 2 Charles Spurgeon, *Spiritual Warfare in a Believer’s Life*, comp. and ed. by Robert Hall (Lynwood, WA: Emerald Books, 1993), 30.
- 3 Article adapted from Hank Hanegraaff, “The Armor,” chap. 8 in *The Prayer of Jesus: Secrets to Real Intimacy with God* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001). We must neither overestimate nor underestimate the power and province of our adversary.